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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002831

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SUBJECT: SUNNI LEADER PESSIMISTIC ABOUT GOI INTENTIONS WITH SAHWA

REF: BAGHDAD 02783

Classified By: POL MINCOUNS ROBERT S. FORD. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. SUMMARY (C) According to Sahwa leader Abu Azaam, the GOI and Shi,a have opposed Sahwa and the Sons of Iraq (SOI) since its establishment, and transitioning the Sahwa to GOI administration would lead to its dissolution. This will increase the sense of betrayal among Sunni Arabs, and could lead to more anti-Coalition, anti-GOI actions. Abu Azaam said that U.S. forces must remain in Iraq, and increase their presence rather than withdraw, because a premature withdrawal of U.S. forces would directly serve Iranian goals. He stressed that voters should throw out the current Iranian-influenced leadership in upcoming elections, although it will be difficult to elect new groups because the current Shi,a political parties are too strong and corrupt. Consequently, Abu Azaam urged that exposure of this corruption and greater U.S. support for new parties is the only way to eliminate these corrupt parties. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) Poloff met with Sahwa leader Thamr al-Tamimi, aka Abu Azaam, August 28, 2008. Abu Azaam is a self-identified Sahwa leader from Abu Ghraib and surrounding areas and has a close relationship with Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) leader Ayad Samarai'e. He echoed opinions expressed in meetings with other Sunni tribal leaders that the SOI and Sahwa improved security in Iraq. RF comment: which opinions? not clear whose - But now, it is a political game and the Sahwa councils are hanging in the balance. Abu Azaam said that the GOI and Shi,a leaders opposed the Sahwa from its establishment, and would not continue the program after its transfer to the GOI. At the same time, the SOI are depending on CF because no one else is in a position to compel the GOI to assume financial responsibility for the Sahwa/SOI. If the contracts are handed over to GOI and it ceases to make the payments, the Sahwa will dissolve, and the resulting sense of betrayal by CF may force the SOI back to insurgency. He also said that, from the beginning, the Harith al-Dhari,s Ulema Council had warned the Sahwa of just such a betrayal, and now it is coming true.

¶3. (C) Abu Azaam was very clear that the sources of current concerns are two-fold and related: Shi,a sectarianism and Iran. Not only had Sahwa improved security, Abu Azaam insisted that SOI actions also had reduced Iranian activity in Iraq by 50 percent. He claimed that neither the Shi,a (especially government leaders) nor Iran want peace in Sunni neighborhoods because it counters Iranian interests of establishing a friendly sectarian government in the region; that any Sunni security-related activity will certainly produce an oppressive response from the Shi,a government - probably at the instructions of Iran.

¶4. (C) Abu Azaam also stressed that the US should not sign any treaty that includes text demanding our full withdrawal. He claimed that the current US negotiating

strategy is exactly the same laid out in the Baker-Hamilton Report. In fact, he said that Iraq needs an increase of US troops, not a withdrawal. Any major decrease in US troop presence would benefit only Iran. It is also very important, according to Abu Azzam, that the US not sign an agreement according to an Iranian timetable and that the US should stop being lenient with Iran.

15. (C) On elections, Abu Azaam asserted that the large incumbent parties do not want change the power structure and do not want elections. Provincial elections, however, are critical and especially so in Baghdad, because Baghdad is one of the most independent governorates despite the GOI's efforts to control it. Local governance is stronger and more effective in Baghdad and any group that wins Baghdad can gain much power. When asked which party stands to do the best, he provided instead a laundry list of problems. The IIP is too small and not really effective. Many of the Sunni parties are also too small, but a unified Sunni list might coalesce the Shi'a against them. He also claimed that the imams are too politically active, that religious parties must be banned, that religion should be totally separate from politics, and that religious activities should be limited to the mosques. (Note: It is not clear whether he includes the IIP in this group, but his statements against religion in politics were quite emphatic. End Note.)

16. (C) Abu Azaam also claimed elections would be difficult because the Shi'a parties were corrupt. He said he had met government officials (NFI) with documentary proof that Abdul Aziz al-Hakim and his party had siphoned government funds to buy buildings and open bank accounts in the UAE. Abu Azaam

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said he would release these documents once he got permission from his sources. As part of a two-pronged strategy, Abu Azaam wants to publish the documents and initiate a campaign for office using his media contacts (citing a close relationship with Al Jazeera).

17. COMMENT: (C) Abu Azaam's claims regarding both the Iranians and GOI plans for the SOI echoed comments that we have heard from many of our Sunni Arab contacts, and demonstrate the deep Sunni skepticism toward the Maliki government. At the same time, he highlighted that he was launching a new, secular political party, and was clearly seeking support for his political program. END COMMENT
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